



January 13, 2013

(By electronic transmission)
City of Alameda Planning Board
2263 Santa Clara Avenue
Alameda, CA 94501

Subject: North Park Street Zoning Amendments and Design Review Manual (Item 7-A on Planning Board's 1-15-13 agenda)

Dear Boardmembers:

The Alameda Architectural Preservation Society (AAPS) would again like to thank staff and the Planning Board for incorporating many of our previous recommendations into the North Park Street zoning amendment text and map and Design Review Manual. As noted before, AAPS is especially interested in the North Park Street Area because it has a high concentration of historic buildings (including some of the oldest in the city), presents many historic preservation development opportunities and is an important gateway to Alameda.

Although there are still some remaining issues, staff and the consultants have done a great job overall and we believe that adoption of these proposals will greatly improve the planning framework within the North Park Street Area. The remaining loose ends seem fairly straightforward, so we are hopeful that the proposals can be adopted expeditiously.

The most significant remaining issues are the height limit for the Gateway District and several of the proposed uses for the Mixed Use District. There are also corrections and clarifications needed for the proposed zoning text.

1. **Change the proposed 60' five story height limit in the proposed "Gateway District" (properties fronting on Park Street) to 40' and three stories as was previously presented at the Planning Board's 8-27-12 and 11-13-12 meetings).** 40' and three stories was what was "adopted and endorsed" by the City Council as part of the Gateway District Strategic Plan on October 7, 2008 (as set forth in the staff report for the October 7, 2008 meeting) and is what is in the General Plan.

AAPS is concerned that a 60' five story height limit will adversely affect the setting of the historic buildings along north Park Street (such as the former "Silver Building" and McGee's) by promoting much taller new buildings that will



visually overwhelm the historic buildings. Five story buildings will also be drastically out of scale with the mostly 1-2 story buildings on the side streets and create a canyon-like effect along Park Street.

Attached are photos of ca. 60' buildings along 3rd Street in Oakland to indicate the kind of streetscape that buildings of this scale can create. Note that 3rd Street's 80' right-of-way-width is the same as Park Street's.

In response to the nonconformity of the proposed 60' five story height limit with the General Plan's 40' three story height limit for the Park Street and Webster Street Business Districts, staff is proposing to delete this General Plan provision. Changing the General Plan to accommodate a zoning change is a backwards process and not consistent with good city planning. The General Plan is intended to be the City's overall "blueprint" for future development and to act as the guide for zoning and other implementing mechanisms. It should not be amended in a piecemeal fashion for such a major issue as the appropriate height and scale of development within the City's two major business districts.

The revised 60' five-story height limit is also not consistent with the Gateway Strategic Plan. Page 3 of the staff report states the following concerning the Gateway Plan:

The 2008 Gateway Strategic Plan is the guiding document for this effort. The draft Zoning Amendment and Design Review Manual are intended to create zoning regulations and design guidelines that will ensure that redevelopment and site improvements are consistent with the community's vision as articulated in the 2008 Gateway Plan.

Changing the height limit to 60' and five stories from the 40' and three stories that was "adopted and endorsed" by the City Council as part of the Gateway Plan does not seem "consistent with the community's vision as articulated in the 2008 Gateway Plan".

2. **Do not allow parking garages and parking lots in the Mixed Use Zone.** The proposed zoning text shows these uses as Conditionally Permitted in the Mixed Use Zone, which is inconsistent with the Zone's stated intent to "maintain a residential building type". Conditionally permitting these uses in the Mixed Use Zone also sets the stage for a repetition of the "Yellow House" incident that occurred several years ago. Conditionally permitting parking garages and parking lots in the Mixed Use Zone also seems



inconsistent with the zoning text's "Purpose" section's provision to "support pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented development".

3. **Require a Use Permit for "Offices Business and Professional" in the Mixed Use District.** A Use Permit is appropriate to ensure that any new or expanded office buildings are in scale with the predominantly residential building types that now comprise most of the Mixed Use District and do not create adverse traffic and other adverse impacts on the District's numerous residential uses and the neighboring Residential District.

Permitted and Conditionally Permitted nonresidential uses in the Mixed Use Zone should generally be small scale. This means relatively small floor areas (perhaps a maximum of 2,000 sq. ft.), limited numbers of employees and uses that will not regularly attract large numbers of customers or visitors within a short period.

4. **Table A: Change the Work-Live building type from "Permitted" to "Conditionally Permitted" in the Mixed Use District.** Showing Work-Live as a permitted building type may be a mistake, since (a) the previous version of this table showed the Work Live building type as only conditionally permitted in the Mixed Use District; and (b) Work-Live is conditionally permitted as a use in Table B.
5. **Clarify the definition of "Artist Studio".** Add the following clause at the end of this definition, expressing the converse of the clause at the end of the definition for "Artist Studio Industrial":

*...that do **not** (emphasis added) require the use of heavy machinery, large scale ovens or kilns, or hazardous materials."*

As we have previously stated, the proposed zoning changes are a big improvement over the existing zoning and should be sent to the City Council as soon as possible for final adoption. We therefore request that the Planning Board include our recommended changes in its overall recommendation to the City Council as part of the Planning Board resolution, rather than have the changes sent back to the Planning Board for a final review.



Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please contact Christopher Buckley at 523-0411 or cbuckleyAICP@att.net if you would like to discuss these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Karin Sidwell".

Karin Sidwell, Chair
Preservation Action Committee
Alameda Architectural Preservation Society

Attachments: Photographs of ca. 60' tall buildings on 3rd Street in Oakland.

cc: Mayor and Councilmembers (By electronic transmission)
Lori Taylor, Andrew Thomas, Nancy McPeak and Erin Garcia, Planning and Building
Department (By electronic transmission)
Park Street Business Association (By electronic transmission)
AAPS Board and Preservation Action Committee (By electronic transmission)